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AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON

DATE/CASE ID: 13 MAY 2008 200601030

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E.O. 12356: N/A

TAGS: PTER, H, PGOV, ASEC, OAS, AR

SUBJECT: AMIA BOMBING IN ARGENTINA/TERRORISM IN  
LATIN AMERICA -- SEPTEMBER 28 CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

1. SUMMARY: MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF ARGENTINE AND U.S. JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS STRONGLY CRITICIZED THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT FOR ITS LACK OF PROGRESS IN SOLVING THE 1992 BOMBING OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY AND 1994 BOMBING OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER IN BUENOS AIRES. THE CRITICISM WAS VOICED AT A PUBLIC HEARING HELD BY THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 28. THE HEARING WAS CALLED BY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN BENJAMIN GILMAN (R-NY) WHOSE STAFF RECENTLY VISITED ARGENTINA. COMMITTEE MEMBERS INDICATED THEY WANTED THE HEARING TO UNDERScore TO THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT ALLEGATIONS OF POLICE INCOMPETENCE AND LACK OF POLITICAL WILL IN PREVENTING AND SOLVING THE BOMBINGS. SEVERAL MEMBERS REQUESTED A CLOSED HEARING IN THE NEAR FUTURE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE INVESTIGATION, THE PRESENCE OF HIZBALLAH IN THE REGION, AND IRANIAN DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY. END SUMMARY

2. CHAIRMAN GILMAN, IN HIS OPENING REMARKSR EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE HEARINGS WOULD HELP STRENGTHEN THE RESOLVE OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE AMIA

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INVESTIGATION. REPRESENTATIVE TOM LANTOS (D-CALIF) CALLED THE AMIA INVESTIGATION A "SERIOUS BLOT" ON ARGENTINA'S REPUTATION. HE CALLED UPON THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT TO PURSUE SERIOUSLY THE INVESTIGATION, ADDING THAT IT WAS OUTRAGEOUS AND INEXCUSABLE THAT SO LITTLE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE TO DATE. LANTOS PREVIOUSLY HAD LOOKED INTO THE ISSUE AS CHAIRMAN OF AN HIRC COMMITTEE DURING THE LAST SESSION OF CONGRESS. REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FLA), WHO CHAIRED THE BULK OF THE HEARING AFTER MR. GILMAN HAD TO LEAVE EARLY FOR THE

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WHITE HOUSE SIGNING OF THE MIDEAST PEACE AGREEMENT, SAID THE INVESTIGATION WAS LACKLUSTER. LANTOS AND SEVERAL OTHER MEMBERS SUGGESTED A FOLLOWUP CLOSED DOOR BRIEFING ON THE REASONS BEHIND THE LACK OF PROGRESS, AND A MORE DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF HIZBALLAH ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION.

3. S/CT COORDINATOR PHILIP C. WILCOX TESTIFIED FOR THE STATE DEPARTMENT. THE FBI WAS REPRESENTED BY ROBERT BYRANT, THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION. U.S. AND ARGENTINE JEWISH LEADERS ALSO TESTIFIED (SEE PARA 10.) IN HIS TESTIMONY, AMB. WILCOX CITED THE ARGENTINE AND WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBINGS AS DEMONSTRATING THE VULNERABILITY OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE TO INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. AFTER OUTLINING GUERRILLA PROBLEMS IN PERU AND COLOMBIA, WILCOX FOCUSED ON ARGENTINA AND THE INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM THREAT EMANATING FROM THE IRAN-BACKED HIZBALLAH WHOSE ACTIVITIES IN THE TRI-BORDER OF ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, AND PARAGUAY INCLUDE NARCOTICS AND SMUGGLING AS WELL AS TERRORISM. AMB. WILCOX SAID HIZBALLAH CELLS ARE  
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CONCEALED AMIDST THE LARGE SHIA' MUSLIM POPULATION OF LEBANESE ORIGIN WHICH HAS SETTLED IN THE TRI-BORDER AREA. LIKE THE GREAT MAJORITY OF LATIN AMERICA'S MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, MOST OF THE MUSLIMS IN THE TRI-BORDER AREA ARE PEACEFUL CITIZENS WHO WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH TERRORISM. NEVERTHELESS, HIZBALLAH HAS USED THE TRI-BORDER AREA FOR FUND RAISING AND RECRUITMENT AND FOR CLANDESTINE SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT CONTROL IS WEAK IN THIS AREA; BORDERS ARE POROUS AND OFTEN UNPATROLLED; AND IT IS A FAVORABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR SUCH OPERATIONS. HE SAID THE ORGANIZATION IS KNOWN TO HAVE CELLS IN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA AS WELL.

4.    WILCOX TESTIFIED THAT ARGENTINE LEADERS HAVE EMPHASIZED THEIR STRONG COMMITMENT TO SOLVE THE AMIA BOMBING AND THE BOMBING OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY. NOTING THAT LARGE SUICIDE BOMBINGS INVOLVING MASS DESTRUCTION

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ARE EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT TO INVESTIGATE, HE NEVERTHELESS EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT NEITHER OF THE ARGENTINE BOMBINGS HAS BEEN SOLVED. IN THE MOST DETAILED DEPARTMENT PUBLIC TESTIMONY TO DATE ON THE ISSUE, WILCOX SUGGESTED THE FOLLOWING REASONS FOR THIS LACK OF SUCCESS:

- ARGENTINA'S LAWS AND ITS INVESTIGATIVE AND JUDICIAL SYSTEMS DO NOT PROVIDE ALL THE TOOLS AND RESOURCES THAT ARE NEEDED TO DEAL AGGRESSIVELY AND INTENSIVELY WITH SUCH MAJOR CRIMES. HE SAID THE U.S. STILL ENCOURAGES EFFORTS BY THE ARGENTINE CONGRESS TO  
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STRENGTHEN ITS ANTI-TERRORISM LAWS IN WAYS THAT WILL ENHANCE THE GOVERNMENT'S CAPABILITIES WITHOUT ENDANGERING CIVIL RIGHTS.

- IN THE PAST, ARGENTINA'S BORDERS HAVE BEEN POROUS AND THE GOVERNMENT LACKED AN ADEQUATE SYSTEM FOR MONITORING IMMIGRATION. RECENTLY, PRESIDENT MENEM'S GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED A NEW PROGRAM TO PREVENT THE USE OF FRAUDULENT TRAVEL DOCUMENTS BY TERRORISTS OR OTHER CRIMINAL ELEMENTS SEEKING TO ENTER THE COUNTRY, AND TO TIGHTEN BORDER CONTROLS AGAINST HOSTILE ELEMENTS.
- ARGENTINA'S INVESTIGATIVE, SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICES HAVE SUFFERED FROM INADEQUATE INTERAGENCY COORDINATION. RECENTLY, STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO PROVIDE GREATER COHESION.
- ARGENTINA ALSO NEEDS TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OFFICIALS WORKING IN LOWER LEVELS OF ITS LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES. THE GOVERNMENT OF ARGENTINA REALIZES THAT TO DEAL WITH MAJOR ACTS OF TERRORISM LIKE THE 1992 AND 1994 BOMBINGS, IMPROVED LAW ENFORCEMENT MACHINERY IS NEEDED.

5. WILCOX EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION AMONG NATIONS IN DEALING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL THREAT. HE SAID THAT USG EXPERIENCE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

SHOWED THAT CLOSE CONSULTATION AND COOPERATION AMONG THE  
LAW ENFORCEMENT, INTELLIGENCE, AND DIPLOMATIC SECURITY  
SERVICES OF FRIENDLY STATES IS CRITICAL TO FIGHTING  
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INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. SPREADING THIS APPROACH OF  
COOPERATION AMONG THE STATES OF OUR OWN HEMISPHERE HAS  
BEEN ONE OF THIS ADMINISTRATION'S FOREMOST

COUNTERTERRORISM GOALS DURING THE PAST YEAR. HE NOTED  
THAT THE U.S., ARGENTINA, AND OTHER LIKE-MINDED NATIONS,  
LED AN INITIATIVE AT THE DECEMBER SUMMIT FOR AN OAS  
MEETING ON TERRORISM, WHICH WILL BE HELD IN LIMA IN  
EARLY 1996. HE SAID THAT ARGENTINA, WHICH HAS BEEN THE  
MOST ACTIVE LATIN AMERICAN STATE IN THIS AREA, CONVENED  
THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL AFTER THE AMIA BOMBING AND  
SOUGHT APPROVAL OF A "DECLARATION ON TERRORISM." A  
SPECIAL SESSION OF THE OAS PEPJ4ANENT COUNCIL WAS HELD  
FOR THE SAME PURPOSE. THE OAS HAS ALSO ESTABLISHED A  
WORKING GROUP ON TERRORISM, CHARGED WITH PREPARATION FOR  
THE 1996 CONFERENCE ON TERRORISM IN LIMA.

6. WILCOX ALSO NOTED THAT ARGENTINA HOSTED A CONFERENCE  
THIS PAST AUGUST IN WHICH THE OTHER STATES OF THE  
SOUTHERN CONE, CHILE, BRAZIL, URUGUAY, AND PARAGUAY, AS  
WELL AS THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, TOOK PART THAT  
MEETING PROPOSED A SERIES OF CONCRETE ANTI-TERRORISM  
COOPERATIVE MEASURES IN SUCH AREAS AS BORDER CONTROL,  
INTELLIGENCE SHARING, EXTRADITION, AND ABUSE OF  
DIPLOMATIC PRIVILEGES. IT ALSO CALLED FOR WIDER  
ADHERENCE TO INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS  
AGAINST TERRORISM. THESE MEASURES CONSTITUTE A  
SIGNIFICANT STEP TOWARD GREATER REGIONAL COOPERATION IN  
COUNTERING THE INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST THREAT.

7. DESCRIBING U.S. SUPPORT FOR THE ARGENTINE  
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INVESTIGATIONS, WILCOX TESTIFIED THAT SHORTLY AFTER THE AMIA BOMBING AN INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TEAM (IRT), MANAGED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S BUREAU OF DIPLOMATIC SECURITY WITH THREE EXPLOSIVES EXPERTS FROM THE BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND FIREARMS (ATF), FLEW TO BUENOS AIRES. ADDITIONALLY, THREE FBI AGENTS PROVIDED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE. A SIMILAR IRT HAD HELPED ARGENTINE IN THE EARLY PHASES OF THE INVESTIGATION OF THE 1992 ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING. THE 1994 TEAM INCLUDED SOME WHO HAD PARTICIPATED IN 1992 AS WELL AS EXPERTS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN INVESTIGATING THE 1993 WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBING.

8. THE IRT SPENT 12 DAYS, WORKING SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH THE ARGENTINE POLICE AND ISRAELI EXPERTS, WHO WERE ALSO AT THE BOMB SITE. MEMBERS OF THE IRT WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN THE RECOVERY OF PARTS OF THE ENGINE OF THE RENAULT VAN, WHICH THE SUICIDE BOMBER USED TO BOMB THE BUILDING, AND WHICH WERE IMPORTANT TO THE INVESTIGATION.

9. WILCOX ALSO REPORTED THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS PROVIDED NUMEROUS ANTI-TERRORISM TRAINING COURSES TO THE

ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S ANTI-TERRORISM ASSISTANCE (ATA) PROGRAM. SINCE ARGENTINA BECAME A PARTICIPANT IN THE ATA PROGRAM IN 1992, ATA HAS TRAINED OVER 280 OFFICIALS IN 17 COURSES, AT A COST OF APPROXIMATELY \$2.2 MILLION. IN THE NEXT TWO FISCAL YEARS, ATA PLANS TO HOLD AN ADDITIONAL 10 COURSES FOR ARGENTINE TO TRAIN OVER 225 STUDENTS THIS HIGHLY SPECIALIZED TRAINING IN MULTIPLE SKILLS WILL COST  
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APPROXIMATELY \$2.6 MILLION, AND WILL COVER OVER 38 WEEKS OF TRAINING.

10. DR. RUBEN BERAJA, PRESIDENT OF THE DELEGATION OF ARGENTINE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS, TESTIFIED THAT THE

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PERPETRATORS NEEDED SUPPORT FROM THE IRANIAN EMBASSY TO CARRY OUT THE AMIA BOMBING. HE ACCUSED MEMBERS OF THE POLICE WITH INVOLVEMENT IN A CAR THEFT RING THROUGH WHICH THEY UNKNOWINGLY GAVE SUPPORT TO THE BOMBER. BERAJA SAID THAT THE GOA'S FAILURE TO PURSUE THE ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING WITH VIGOR HAS GIVEN TERRORISTS THE FEELING THEY CAN OPERATE WITH IMPUNITY IN ARGENTINA. THIS FACTOR MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THEIR SELECTING ANOTHER TARGET IN ARGENTINA, HE SAID. BERAJA OBSERVED, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOA OFFERED A TWO MILLION DOLLAR REWARD FOR INFORMATION FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND THE ARGENTINE CONGRESS HAD FORMED AN OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE FOR THE AMIA INVESTIGATION.

11. RABBI AVI WEISS, NATIONAL PRESIDENT FOR JEWISH CONCERN, DISAGREED WITH THE FOCUS OF WILCOX, BRYANT, AND OTHER WITNESSES, ON THE ROLE OF THE IRAN EMBASSIES IN INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. WEISS, NOTING THAT HIZBALLAH OPERATES FROM SYRIAN CONTROLLED AREAS OF LEBANON, CLAIMED THAT NOT ENOUGH ATTENTION HAD BEEN PAID TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT DAMASCUS ALSO WAS A POSSIBLE CULPRIT. WEISS THEORIZED THAT RIGHT WING NEO-NAZI ELEMENTS IN THE GOA, APPOINTED BY THE MENEM ADMINISTRATION TO HIGH-LEVEL POSITIONS IN THE AREA OF SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE HAVE HINDERED THE INVESTIGATION. WEISS STRONGLY CRITICIZED ARGENTINE BORDER AND IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES, STATING

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THEY WERE NON-EXISTENT OR COMPROMISED; AS AN EXAMPLE, HE SAID HE TOOK A FERRY BOAT FROM URUGUAY TO BUENOS AIRES WITH A TAPE RECORDER AND OTHER EQUIPMENT THAT COULD CONCEAL EXPLOSIVES AND WAS NEVER CHECKED, EVEN FOR BORDER CONTROL PURPOSES.

12. WEISS ALSO CLAIMED THAT TELLEDIN, THE ONLY SUSPECT BEHIND BARS, HAD BEEN OFFERED A MILLION DOLLARS TO REMAIN QUIET ABOUT POLICE INVOLVEMENT IN THE CAR RING SCAM. WEISS TESTIFIED THAT AFTER VOICING HIS VIEW

PUBLICLY IN BUENOS AIRES THAT THERE WAS A GOA COVERUP UNDERWAY, HE WAS SUBPOENAED BY THE JUDGE GALEANO, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF THE AMIA BOMBING.

WEISS ASSERTED THAT HE WAS HELD FOR QUESTIONING FOR SIX HOURS IN AN ATTEMPT TO INTIMIDATE HIM. AT THIS POINT, DR. BERAJA INTERJECTED THAT HE AND OTHER ARGENTINES WHO SPOKE OUT ON THE MATTER DID NOT FEEL THEIR RIGHTS OF FREE SPEECH HAD BEEN ABUSED. WEISS ALSO RECOMMENDED U.S. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND PRESSURE ON ARGENTINA TO COMPEL IT TO RESOLVE THE BOMBING. (BERAJA TOLD WILCOX AFTER THE HEARING THAT HE STRONGLY DISAGREED WITH WEISS'S RECOMMENDATIONS.)

13. BARRY I MEHLER, A NATIONAL COMMISSIONER OF THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (WHICH SENT A DELEGATION TO ARGENTINA IN APRIL) CALLED THE TRI-BORDER AREA "VERY POROUS." HE PROPOSED THAT A TRI-LATERAL COMMISSION BE ESTABLISHED BY ARGENTINA, BRAZIL AND PARAGUAY "TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF THE GROUPS THAT LIVE IN THE AREA. HE ADDED THAT THERE CERTAINLY SHOULD BE INFILTRATORS AS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WELL AS MONITORS AT WORK.71

14. LIST OF WITNESSES:

AMBASSADOR PHILIP C. WILCOX  
COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM

ROBERT M. BRYANT, FBI ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR NATIONAL  
SECURITY DIVISION

DR. LUIS CZYZEWSKI, ARGENTINE CITIZEN AND FATHER OF AN  
AMIA BOMBING VICTIM

DR RUBEN BERAJA, PRESIDENT  
-DELEGATION OF ARGENTINE JEWISH ASSOCIATIONS

RABBI AVI WEISS  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT COALITION FOR JEWISH CONCERN

TOMMY P. BAER  
PRESIDENT B'NAI B'RITH

JACOB KOVADLOFF, CONSULTANT FOR LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRES



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AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

ISRAEL SINGER, SECRETARY GENERAL WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS

BARRY I. MEHLER, NATIONAL COMMISSIONER  
ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE

RALPH GOLDMAN

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FATHER OF A VICTIM OF THE 1992 ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING,  
AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, HE WORKS FOR THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION  
COMMITTEE IN NEW YORK.  
CHRISTOPHER

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